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Toronto metro

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TORONTO CELL

Vigilance urged after reported ISIL threat

Chris Bateman
For Metro | Toronto

Don’t be surprised if there’s an ISIL cell operating in Toronto, a counterterrorism expert says.

Kamran Bokhari, a University of Ottawa professor who studies extremism, said a BBC News report that referred to possible “jihadist cells” in Toronto and Chicago should be taken seriously.

“We don’t know what’s in Toronto, we’re speculating, but if we’re getting reports it warrants a very close inspection from the RCMP and our other law enforcement agencies, including CSIS,” Bokhari said.

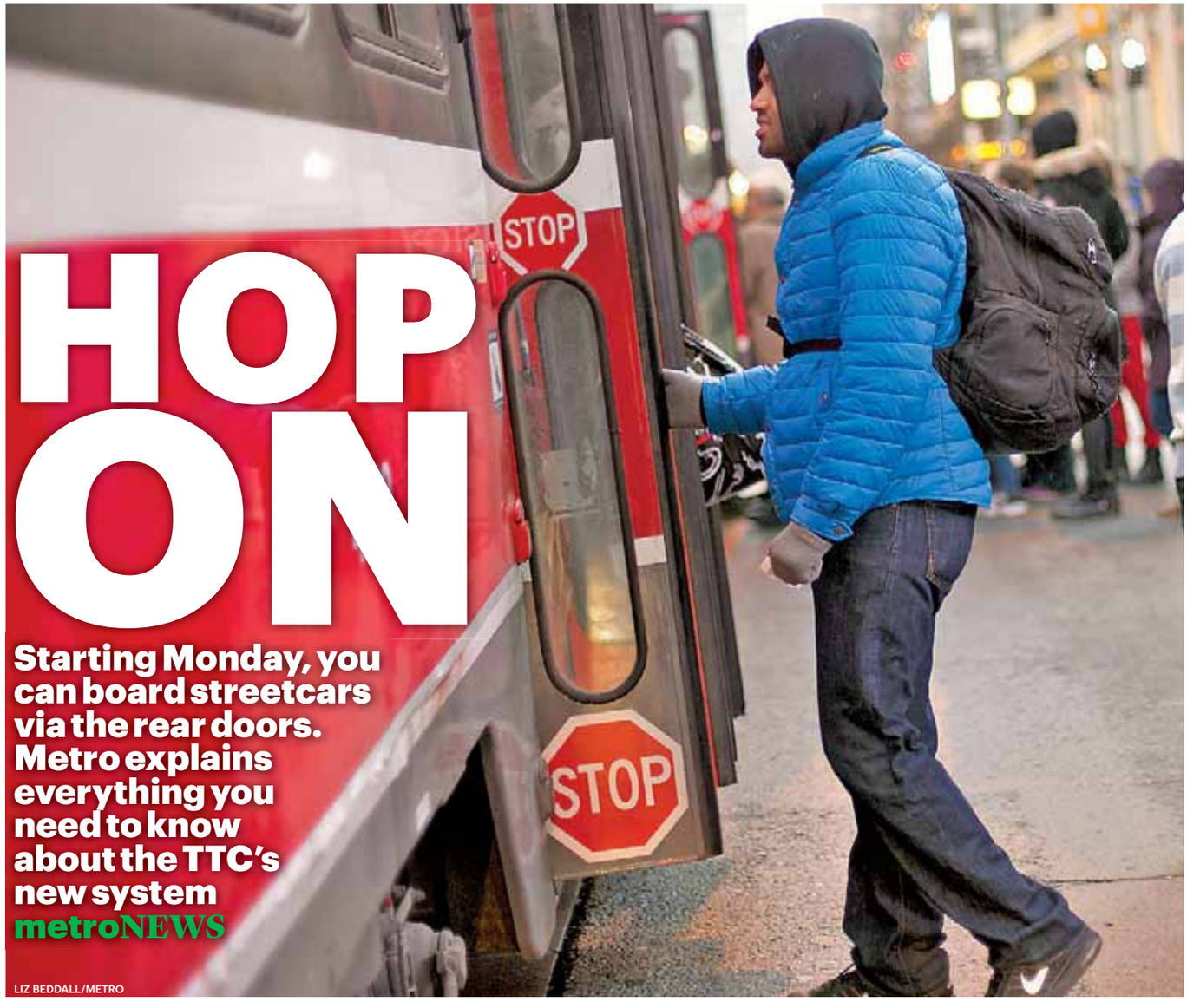
“If it turns out there’s nothing, that’s great, but I want to do the homework and not assume that’s the case.”

The report came after police in Geneva arrested two Syrian nationals on suspicion of making explosives.

The tip about the suspected ISIL terrorists came from U.S. intelligence, which also identified possible cells in Chicago and Toronto, according to Swiss paper Le Temps.

Bokhari said the reported Toronto cell could be nothing more than ISIL “fanboys,” but urged people to remain vigilant. “See something, say something,” he said.

Reached by phone, Toronto police and the RCMP were unable to comment on the report.



HOP ON

Starting Monday, you can board streetcars via the rear doors. Metro explains everything you need to know about the TTC’s new system

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LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

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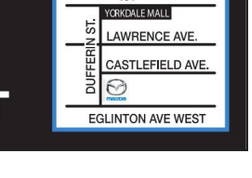

metro NEWS
Your essential daily news

Tears, love and family greet newly arrived Syrian refugees in Montreal. **Canada**

LOCAL CELEBRITY

Fears for safety of tuxedo squirrel

Tuxedo squirrel, the Annex's most famous mixed-colour rodent, is feared dead.

Local resident Lisa Volkov said she found a body matching the squirrel's distinctive description on Sussex Avenue near Bloor Street and Spadina Avenue while out walking her dog late last Thursday.

"I saw a squirrel stretched across the street and I looked and to my horror it was this squirrel," she said. "I actually cried out. I was that upset."

Volkov said the squirrel had no visible signs of injury. She placed it beneath a nearby tree and when she returned the body had mysteriously vanished.

"I felt I had this moral responsibility to tell people," she said. "I was devastated. Every person I told was also devastated. People were very upset."

Tuxedo squirrel rose to fame in October when Alana Johns, another Annex resident, noticed its rare and unusually neat piebald markings and sent pictures to Metro News.

David Sugarman, an animal expert at the Ontario Science Centre, said the squirrel's marking were caused by a lack of pigment cells in the skin.

The Annex's popular tuxedo squirrel appears to have died. CONTRIBUTED

He called the neat arrangement of white patches on the squirrel's ears, paws, nose, and tail "an uncommon thing."

In life, tuxedo squirrel was the subject of YouTube videos, photos, even poetry.

"It's sad, but ultimately it was a regular squirrel and had a regular squirrel life and a very common squirrel death," Johns said.

"Maybe he or she had offspring. Maybe it will be more common in Toronto to have mixed colour squirrels." CHRIS BATEMAN/FOR METRO

"Every person I told was also devastated. People were very upset. Lisa Volkov

A drawing of the park's revamp shows additional trees and playgrounds, as well as room for public art. CONTRIBUTED

Redux for Grange

PUBLIC SPACE

Revitalization of historic park is 8 years in the making

Chris Bateman
For Metro | Toronto

Toronto kids are getting a new home on the Grange.

An $11 million, two-year overhaul of Grange Park set to begin this winter will add new trees, water features, public art, and two "pretty damn cool" new play areas, said Coun. Joe Cressy.

"The revitalization will transform what is already an iconic park into one that truly reflects the history of the Grange," said Cressy. "(It) will animate an important green space in the heart of downtown Toronto."

After eight years of planning, the city gave the Grange Park Advisory Committee approval to issue tenders for construction last week.

Located at the rear of the Art Gallery of Ontario between Beverley and McCaul streets, Grange was originally the garden of a large residential property owned by D'Arcy Boulton, Jr., a member of a prominent early Toronto family.

Boulton's house, built in 1817, is one of the oldest surviving buildings in Toronto. As part of the revitalization, the steps leading up to the front door will be turned into a gathering and performance space.

Built in 1817, the Grange is one of the oldest buildings in Toronto. LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

The park will also get new paving, 60 additional trees, and an art-themed play area and splash pad in the northwest corner of the park with sculpture-like climbing structures.

"Every kid in the city of Toronto is going to want to play there," Cressy said.

The famous bronze sculpture Large Two Forms by Henry Moore, which has stood at the corner of Dundas and McCaul since 1974, will also be moved inside the park as part of the overhaul.

The City of Toronto has agreed to fund half the cost. The remainder will be split between the W. Garfield Weston Foundation and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Cressy said.

The design of the new park was created by PFS Studios, the Vancouver-based landscape architecture firm responsible for Underpass Park and Sherbourne Common in Toronto's east end.

Work is expected to be completed by the July, 2017.

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Advocates push for poverty funding

CITY BUDGET

Proposal includes rent and child-care subsidies

Toronto's 2016 operating budget must include at least $75 million for poverty reduction to ensure city council's quest to create prosperity for all residents "takes off with determination and goodwill," say community leaders and activists.

Toronto's first-ever comprehensive strategy to fight poverty, passed unanimously by council last month, "has the potential to be a real game changer," the activists say in a letter to Toronto Mayor John Tory and city councillors on the eve of Tuesday's 2016 budget launch.

"Together, let's build a legacy of hope, fairness and opportunity for everyone in our city," says the letter signed by more than 50 community leaders, including the heads of Civic Action, the United Way and Social Planning Toronto and endorsed by the Toronto Board of Trade.

The letter lists 49 poverty-busting recommendations to kick-start action on four key areas — jobs, children, housing and transit — highlighted in TO Prosperity, the city's 20-year anti-poverty blueprint.

More than two-thirds of the recommendations can be achieved in 2016 through better planning and co-ordination, say the leaders, who also represent more than 75 local organizations whose members participated in a community effort to inform the city initiative.

But the remaining one-third needs up to $75 million in new investment in 2016 to make serious headway on the poverty plan's goals of improving access to affordable child care, housing and transit.

"We understand that decisions need to be made with the broader backdrop of the city's fiscal situation," said Civic Action's Sevaun Palvetzian.

"But our most vulnerable people can't fall to the background."

The group's proposed new spending would provide an additional 7,000 rent supplements, 1,000 more supportive housing units and 1,500 new child care subsidies. And it would allow the city to freeze adult transit fares until a low-income transit pass is introduced in 2017.

Some of the no-cost measures for 2016 will set the stage for spending in future years, such as creating living wage and job quality standards for all city jobs and contracts.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

$75 million

The amount of funding the city's operating budget should include for poverty reduction, according to local activists.

IN BRIEF

Driver charged after crashing into house

A driver is facing charges after a car slammed into a house near Upper Canada College and caught fire early Sunday.

The driver and a passenger, who suffered minor injuries, fled the scene but were later located by police. The building, which suffered heavy structural and fire damage, was empty at the time of the collision. Police say damage is estimated to be upwards of $1 million.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Humans of Toronto by K. Omar

"I think that learning to accept people for who they are is important. As you get older and grow as a person, you become very self-aware. We all try to conform people into what we think they should be or how we think they should learn, but, really, we should just alter the way that we coach, train and teach people, or even speak to people.

.....

Humans of Toronto is K. Omar's social photography project aimed at photographing and talking to people in the city. Selections from her work feature weekly in Metro. See more at Humans_of_Toronto on Instagram.

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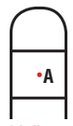

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The TTC goes POP

Starting Monday, it's legal to get on a streetcar via the rear doors at any time, anywhere in the city, provided you have proof-of-payment (POP) — a valid Presto card, transfer or pass. Here is everything you need to know about the TTC's switch to POP. **CHRIS BATEMAN** FOR METRO

What is it?

Proof-of-payment, or POP, is anything that proves you have paid your TTC fare.

Starting Monday, that includes a valid Presto card, paper transfer, or pass. "If you pay by token, cash, or ticket, you do what you normally do: enter through the front door," said TTC spokesman Brad Ross.

There will be random spot checks by inspectors in an effort to deter fare cheats, Ross said. Fines range from $235 to $425.

The change comes as the TTC prepares to activate Presto readers across the streetcar fleet. Previously, all-door boarding was limited to a handful of streetcar routes.

Ross said POP will speed up service at busy stops.

How do I use Presto?

Tap your card on a Presto reader at the front or rear doors of the streetcar. You don't need to tap off when you exit, unlike on GO Transit.

Streetcar passengers board via the rear doors, at Yonge and Dundas Square. Starting Monday, all-door boarding is available on all streetcar routes. LIZ BEDDALL/METRO; SMALL IMAGES COURTESY TTC

Will I still need a transfer?

If you're paying with Presto or using a pass, technically not. The TTC still recommends riders grab a transfer and keep it handy in case a fare inspector asks to see it.

New fare gates are coming

In addition to POP, the TTC is also debuting new fare gates at Main Street subway station this month. Eventually the Presto-ready gates will be installed system-wide. Some of the oldest turnstiles on the TTC date back to 1954, Ross said.

The new gates will help the TTC collect better rider data, Ross said, and prevent objects like bicycles, bags and strollers from jamming the turnstiles.

What happens to tokens?

Time is sadly limited for the humble token. The little coins will be phased out by the end of 2016, when the TTC switches to Presto and cash fares only.

POLICE

Shots fired outside baby shower, 2 hurt

Toronto police are investigating a shooting that happened outside a building where a baby shower was being held.

Investigators say two men with gunshot wounds to their legs were taken to hospital just after 8 p.m. Saturday. Paramedics said one of the men was seriously injured.

Residents of the neighbourhood in the Keele-Eglinton area said more than a dozen shots were fired, and that several children were in the vicinity.

Police said they were looking for two black men wearing dark clothing.

Toronto has seen a rash of gunfire incidents that began Friday afternoon when a 28-year old man, who police say was known to them, was shot and killed in the downtown entertainment district while sitting in a parked car.

Police described it as a drive-by shooting.

"We have reports that one car pulled up to another, opened fire, and then took off," said Const. Victor Kwong.

He added that multiple witnesses told officers "upwards of 10 shots" were fired, and that police were looking for a silver car — either an Infiniti or a Lexus.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE/FILES FROM THE CANADIAN PRESS

IN BRIEF

Pilot badly injured in crash

A 61-year-old pilot is in hospital with serious injuries after a small-plane crash Saturday in Scugog Township, Ont., near Port Perry.

Durham police say the lone occupant of the plane was taken to Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto, and that a couple watching the incident helped the pilot and called emergency services.

The Transportation Safety Board, which is investigating, says the plane was a single-engine ultra-light craft. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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‘There’s nothing left’: Homeowner

FIRE

Brampton townhouses gutted by late-night blaze

Above: Brampton fire officials investigate a blaze that broke out in a townhouse complex Saturday, destroying many homes.
Right: Parveen Thaper, right, holds back tears and discusses the loss of her home.
VINCE TALOTTA/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Parveen Thaper stood alone in her nightgown Saturday night and watched as the first house she’d bought in her 22 years in Canada was engulfed in flames.

Her two children, who lived there with her, were away and her cat, Nunu, had fled.

“There’s nothing left,” Thaper said through tears Sunday, as her two children comforted her.

Hers was one of eight homes in a row of Brampton townhouses to be destroyed in a fire that started Saturday night and continued into Sunday morning.

Thaper and her children — both in their twenties — had no close relatives or friends with whom they could stay, but finally found a shelter.

Thaper couldn’t sleep, though. Dressed in clothes neighbours gave her, she took four buses from the Peel Family Shelter and trekked back to Darras Court to see what she’d lost.

Another family had come back, too. The mother briefly crouched down and cried as her family loaded into her sister’s car. Neighbours crowded on the street, discussing what happened and comforting the affected families.

“My mom, she’s a single parent. She’s been struggling all her life and she managed to get us a house and make it a home,” Thaper’s eldest, 23-year-old Victoria Teji, said.

That home had become wreckage. The fire spread quickly from one unit to the rest, engulfing the whole building’s top half.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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Ross Marsden pumps water out his son's basement near Royal York and Bloor after a 2013 storm. Toronto Water hopes charging people for stormwater runoff will reduce incidents of basement flooding. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE FILE

New fee adds to water bills

UTILITY

Stormwater charge goes to improvements

Jessica Smith Cross
Metro | Toronto

The head of Toronto Water is hoping to fix two big problems — flooded basements and regular sewage dumps into Lake Ontario — with a new line on your water bill.

Last week, city council gave Toronto Water the go-ahead to charge property owners not just for the water they use but also the amount of stormwater runoff they create.

The new stormwater fee will appear as a separate charge on your water bill.

The money will go to pay for expensive capital projects meant to fix the problems caused by — you guessed it — stormwater.

"It's about linking what you're paying for with what you get," said Lou Di Gironimo, general manager of Toronto Water.

When Toronto gets heavy rainfalls, the sewer system becomes overloaded. That can cause homeowners' basements to flood and sewage from the city's old combined sewers to be released into the Don River and Lake Ontario.

The first problem can be a giant pain for homeowners and is a frequent source of complaints to the city; the second is serious environmental concern, Di Gironimo said.

"The public tells us they want these programs," he said. "They want us to deal with basement flooding and want us to deal with cleaning up the environment. But to fix them, we need to make significant investments."

Water rates are already on the rise to pay for the stormwater programs. Last week, council approved an 8 per cent increase for 2016 and further increases are forecasted.

"So we think it's the right time now to have a separate charge so we can explain to the public that when this money is raised, it's used for this specific program, they can't see exactly where it's going."

The new billing system requires final approval from council before it's implemented, likely in 2018.

PAVE PARADISE, YOU'LL PAY MORE

Paved lots like malls will pay stormwater premium

A property with a lot of green space absorbs stormwater well, but a fully paved property causes stormwater to flood into sewers, contaminating the lake.

Under the new plan, Toronto Water will charge large paved properties like malls more. At first, the distinction will only be applied to large industrial water users. Eventually, the utility could do the same for private homes down the road, said says Toronto Water manager Lou Di Gironimo.

Likewise, buildings with built-in stormwater management systems and swaths of green space would have lower stormwater costs than those with neither. JESSICA SMITH CROSS / METRO

HONEST ED'S TO GOODNESS

Toronto football legend Michael "Pinball" Clemons, right, and Blue Jays centre-fielder Dalton Pompey helped give away 1,300 turkeys and fruitcakes at Honest Ed's on Sunday. Clemons expressed hope the 2016 closure of the iconic superstore wouldn't spell the end of this act of charity, an annual event since 1987. He's been part of it since 1990.

"Honest Ed was a role model for me, on how to live. He shared so much with the community," he said, "To be here today, next to Dalton Pompey, who was born two years after the first time I came to this — you can see that legacy being passed on. We won't let the spirit die. It's time for others to pick up where he left off."

LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

‘Arrival is a Christmas present’

SYRIAN REFUGEES

Anas Fransis reunited with relatives after 8 years

The arrival of a second federal government planeload of Syrian refugees in Montreal Saturday night was “a real Christmas present” for one Syrian man who was reunited with family he hasn’t seen in eight years.

Anas Fransis and his mother were at the welcome centre near the airport to welcome Fransis’ uncle and his wife, their two teenage daughters and Fransis’ grandmother, who were among the 161 privately-sponsored refugees to make the trip from Beirut to Canada aboard a government aircraft.

Fransis ran out to greet them, twirling his cousins and embracing the adults. His grandmother, Laila Saeed, was the last one through the door, her face wet with tears.

“They’ll be here for Christmas, they’ll be here for New Year’s,” said Fransis, who came to Canada from Syria in 2008. “Their arrival is a Christmas present ... a real Christmas present.”

His 13-year-old cousin Laila Beylouneh was excited for her family’s new start.

“My future is starting now,” she said in English. “I wish all my dreams will come true.”

Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard was on hand with Federal Immigration Minister John McCallum and Montreal Mayor Denis Coderre to greet the refugees, who landed around 8 p.m. Saturday. Numerous other federal and provincial cabinet ministers were also in attendance.

Speaking to volunteers ahead of time, Couillard said he was taking a special interest in the proceedings because he and his wife will be sponsoring a refugee family who are set to arrive in early 2016. He said he was proud of Quebec and Canada’s efforts to welcome the newcomers.

The arrival comes less than 48 hours after a government aircraft brought 163 refugees to Toronto on Thursday.

More than 400 refugees have arrived by commercial flights since the federal Liberals took power last month, but these have been the first to be brought by government aircraft.

Upon arrival at Montreal’s Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport, border services agents confirmed the refugees’ identities and issued them interim health program certificates. By the time they were bussed to the centre they were officially permanent residents of Canada.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Newly arrived Syrian refugee Samer Beylouneh, left, wipes a tear as his daughter Laila greets her aunt Marie Belona at a welcome centre in Montreal Saturday. PAUL CHIASSON/THE CANADIAN PRESS

B.C.-BOUND

Relatives of drowned boy to arrive by year’s end

The aunt of a Syrian toddler whose lifeless body pictured on a Mediterranean beach sparked global outrage over a refugee crisis says the flights have been booked to bring her relatives to Canada.

Tima Kurdi says her brother Mohammad Kurdi, along with his wife and five children, are scheduled to arrive in British Columbia on Dec. 28.

Mohammad is the uncle of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old boy who died alongside his mother and older brother when their overcrowded boat flipped while crossing the waters between Turkey and Greece.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Remission order sought

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Aboriginal employees hounded for back taxes

The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has been aggressively collecting back taxes from a group of mostly low-income indigenous women who lost a long-running legal battle to be exempt from paying personal income taxes because their employer was situated on a reserve.

Native Leasing Services, an employee outsourcing company that has its headquarters on Six Nations of the Grand River, a reserve near Brantford, Ont., is seeking a remission order from National Revenue Minister Diane Lebouthillier — who would have to recommend it to cabinet for approval — on behalf of 3,916 former employees.

"Most of the applicants live on or near the poverty line.... A large portion of these employees will never be able to pay the tax assessments that have been made against them," Jim Fyshe, a lawyer working probono for Native Leasing Services, wrote in the application for a remission order filed in June 2013.

The employees, whose annual income at Native Leasing Services averaged about $27,000, according to Fyshe, are being pursued by collections officers who are putting liens on their homes, garnishing their wages and clawing back benefits for years of personal income taxes after the courts supported a decision by Canada Revenue Agency to reinterpret the Indian Act.

One of them is Ramona Dunn, 53, who the CRA says owes nearly $94,000 in taxes, fines and interest for the five years she worked as a registered nurse and diabetes educator at Anishnawbe Health Toronto, where she was technically an employee of Native Leasing Services.

Dunn said she took the job at the non-profit agency for a smaller salary than she would have earned at a hospital for the chance to work with her people.

"I was willing to work for less money than my skill set would have given for me just for the chance of working in my community and helping my people," Dunn said, adding the tax exemption, which she still believes she has a right to as a status Indian, helped make up some of the difference in take-home pay.

Philippe Brideau, a CRA spokesman, said remission orders are considered on a case-by-case basis.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

The CRA says Ramona Dunn, seen in front of her home in Exeter, Ont., **owes $94,000 in back taxes.** TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

> **"Never in a million years would I have thought they would go after me.**
> Ramona Dunn

INNOVATION

Grinder doesn't go to pot

A group of Winnipeg entrepreneurs are busting their way into the marijuana scene by re-inventing a 110-year-old design called The Clipper.

Matt Olsen said he, Greg Moneta and Jesse Marr came up with the idea to create a brand-new "herb" grinder.

Olsen said the idea stems from the input of regular grinder users. The biggest difference is a rotating stainless-steel blade and a patented wedge design the group says cuts herbs rather than mulching them and reduces user effort.

The group said it is in partnership with Lift Innovations and has already been approached by distributors who want to carry the product.

EVAN MATTHEWS/ FOR METRO

The Clipper with its newly designed blades. CONTRIBUTED

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Planet on a 'carbon diet'

ENVIRONMENT

Close to 200 nations sign on to ambitious Paris eco-pact

The world is about to go on a carbon diet and it won't be easy — or cheap.

Nearly 200 nations worldwide approved a first-of-its-kind universal agreement Saturday to wean Earth off fossil fuels and slow global warming.

On Sunday morning, as with many first day dieters, the reality set in. The numbers — like calorie limits and gym time — are daunting.

How daunting? Try more than 7.04 billion tons. That's how much carbon dioxide needs to stay in the ground instead of being spewed into the atmosphere for those reductions to happen — if you take the easier of two goals mentioned in Saturday's deal. To get to the harder goal, the number is even larger.

In the pact, the countries pledged to limit global warming to about another degree Celsius — and if they can, only half that much.

A vaguer goal is that by sometime in the second half of the century, man-made greenhouse gas emissions — including methane and other heat-trapping gases as well as carbon dioxide — won't exceed the amount nature absorbs. Earth's complex and ever-changing carbon cycle would have to get back to balance.

In practice, the world will have to emit almost zero greenhouse gases by 2070 to reach the easier goal, or by 2050 to reach the harder one, said John Schellnhuber, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany.

The harder goal — limit warming by another half a degree Celsius — is probably already impossible, said Joeri Rogelj at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Austria. Most likely the best the world can hope for is overshooting by a few tenths of a degree and then slowly bring the temperature back down to the target. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The slogan "DECARBONIZE" is projected on the Eiffel Tower as part of the COP21 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France on Dec. 11. FRACOIS MORI/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FRANCE

Le Pen defeated in vote

Marine Le Pen's far-right National Front collapsed in French regional elections Sunday, failing to take a single region after dominating the first round of voting, pollsters projected. Xavier Bertrand's conservatives surged against the governing Socialists, changing the political map of France.

The failure of the National Front to gain any of the six regions didn't stop the party from looking to the 2017 presidential election — Le Pen's ultimate goal.

Le Pen had been riding high after extremist attacks and an unprecedented wave of migration into Europe, and the party came out on top in the voting in France's 13 newly drawn regions in the first round a week ago. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"Here we stopped ... the National Front
Conservative Xavier Bertrand

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Cab drivers slow down traffic on Lake Shore Boulevard during their day of protest against Uber in Toronto on Dec. 9. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Uber rolling out $5 flat-rate service

RIDE SHARING

Larger vehicles will pick up groups for commutes

The ride-hailing service Uber is pushing ahead with a new commuting service known as UberHop, offering $5 flat-rate rides on weekdays during rush hour on four specific routes.

UberHop, which launched last Thursday in Seattle, begins in Toronto on Tuesday, where larger vehicles like SUVs and minivans will pick up to five passengers from the same spot on a fixed route, usually a side street.

"We have seen a huge interest in people needing simpler and lower-cost commutes," said Ian Black, Uber Canada's general manager. "There are many routes that aren't served by transit. There are many cases where they need to get somewhere relatively quickly."

Unlike UberPool, which ran as a pilot project during the Pan Am Games last summer where a driver could pick up two different ride requests heading on a similar route, UberHop looks more like a small-scale transit service.

It will offer rides, from 7 to 10 a.m. and between 4:30 and 7:30 p.m. on weekdays, between Liberty Village and the financial district, Fort York and the financial district, CityPlace and the financial district, and the Distillery District and the financial district.

"These four neighbourhoods are high-density areas, with large numbers of people going back and forth to the downtown core, with not many efficient transit options," said Black.

> **There are many routes that aren't served by transit.**
> Ian Black

The program will start with four routes and Uber will consider adding other ones depending on demand such as between Regent Park and downtown or parts of Scarborough and downtown, Black said.

The new service comes as taxi drivers are becoming more frustrated and vocal with Toronto city hall's inability to halt Uber's operations. Taxi drivers created traffic nightmares last week with a widespread protest.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

ECONOMY

Liberal deficit could hit $25 billion a year

Now that the federal Liberals have shied away from their vow to keep annual deficits under $10 billion, they've latched on to another fiscal target.

The new government is suddenly talking about the debt-to-GDP ratio, promising repeatedly to keep it on a downward track every year until the next election.

The government calculates its debt-to-GDP ratio by dividing total federal debt by the overall size of the economy, as measured by nominal GDP.

It represents a government's capacity to pay back debt — and focusing on it gives politicians more spending flexibility.

By targeting debt-to-GDP, the Liberals could be prepared to run annual deficits of up to $25 billion in the coming years and still lower the ratio — as long as the economy grows at a decent pace, economists say.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

IN BRIEF

More Canadians turning to pint-size housing

The desire to save time is one factor cited by the growing number of Canadians who are turning to alternative styles of housing, ranging from narrow houses to tiny ones to those sandwiched into laneways between other homes. Other factors include environmental considerations and affordability concerns, as home prices in cities continue to soar out of reach for many. THE CANADIAN PRESS

metro VIEWS
Your essential daily news
Monday, December 14, 2015

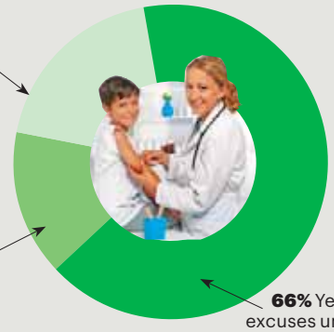
Metro MONDAY POLL

One nation under vaccination

Visit metronews.ca **every Friday to have your say.**

Under a proposed Ontario law, parents will have to attend an education session at the local public-health unit if they want a vaccine exemption for non-medical reasons. Few things have been more explosively controversial — or more maligned — in recent years than vaccinations, though evidence conclusively shows they're safe and effective. In fact, they're so effective that many of us have never personally encountered a vaccine-preventable illness. We asked our readers for forgotten family stories about the fear-filled days before shots prevented some of the most deadly diseases.

1 Should all routine vaccinations be mandatory in Canada?

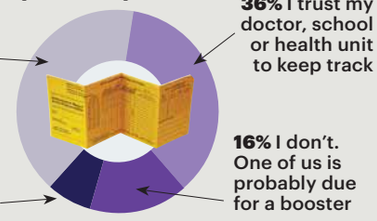


19% No, it should be up to parents

15% No , but there should be a serious consequence for not vaccinating (i.e. a financial penalty, or being banned from school)

66% Yes, no excuses unless there is a valid health exception

2 How do you keep track of vaccinations for yourself or your family?



41% Old-fashioned paper

36% I trust my doctor, school or health unit to keep track

16% I don't. One of us is probably due for a booster

7% Digitally/ with an app

3 What's your experience with vaccine-preventable diseases?

40% I've never had one & don't know anyone who has.
32% I've suffered from a vaccine-preventable disease.
17% A family member or someone I know has had one.
11% Either myself, someone I know or a family member has suffered permanent effects of a vaccine-preventable disease.

We had to cancel a trip because someone at my son's daycare got chickenpox.

My grandfather was partially paralyzed for life due to polio.

I contracted measles as a small child and was left partly deaf.

I had measles, mumps and chickenpox before there were vaccines. They were all miserable.

WE ASKED Metro readers

With our zoning laws, the poor are locked out

TORY'S TORONTO

Matt Elliott

Last week, in the midst of yet another Toronto City Council debate about a strategy to deal with the city's affordable housing crisis, Coun. Joe Cressy turned to chief planner Jennifer Keesmaat and asked her to help with some math.

At the core of Cressy's query was the issue of inclusionary zoning. It's used in more than 200 communities and cities in North America — but not Toronto — to build affordable housing. It works by mandating that a percentage of units built in private development projects be designated as affordable homes.

Toronto is a city that somehow has both a housing boom and a housing crisis.

Cressy started by asking Keesmaat how many new residential development projects there have been in Toronto over the last five years.

The answer, according to the chief planner, is 596 projects, representing 109,433 new units. A big number, but it seems accurate, seeing as I can't go anywhere these days without running into a glossy condo ad trying to sell me on the merits of 400-square-foot living and granite countertops.

Then came the tricky part. "Had we had an inclusionary zoning policy in place prior to the construction of those units," asked Cressy, "how many affordable units could we have created?"

Keesmaat didn't hesitate. Assuming an inclusionary zoning policy mandating 10 per cent of all units in large buildings be set aside for affordable housing, the city would have created 10,000 new affordable homes, she said — housing for about 20,600 people.

But that didn't happen. It couldn't. Despite making 14 separate requests to the provincial government since 1999, Toronto still hasn't been granted the power to use inclusionary zoning. Without it, the city was able to create just 2,800 affordable units over the last five years.

Meanwhile, there are more than 95,000 households on the city's affordable housing waiting list.

Such is our weird reality. Toronto is a city that somehow has both a housing boom and a housing crisis. But the proven policy that could help to bridge that gap isn't allowed.

That isn't to say inclusionary zoning is a silver bullet. Any strategy on affordable housing still needs to come with government funding. More importantly, an inclusionary zoning mandate won't do much if every development application asking for more than six storeys gets shouted down by neighbours as an affront to their way of life.

Yes, sorry NIMBYs, inclusionary zoning will require density. It'll require less red tape for developers, too.

For those of us who are cool with that, there's reason to be cautiously optimistic. The provincial government has said they're working on a housing strategy update that could include provisions for inclusionary zoning. But there's no time to waste. As it stands, the math on inclusionary zoning is simple — it adds up to a missed opportunity.

Matt Elliott lives and writes in Toronto. Follow him on Twitter @GraphicMatt

ROSEMARY WESTWOOD

metroview

Stumped? I'm here to help with your hard-to-buy-for list

You're very busy, I know.

You have 15 people to buy presents for, and that's not even counting yourself. Sure, you made a trip to the mall, but it took three days to find your way out again (online shopping has decimated your mall-navigation skills).

Well, I'm here to offer a few tips for those hard-to-buy-for listees.

Let's start in the obvious place: Justin Trudeau. Now that he's a sex symbol in the U.S. (those Vogue photos? Grrrr!), he's likely wondering what this means for his future memoir endeavours. Common Ground was a bit of political positioning ahead of the election. It's far too on-the-nose for a sex-symbol memoir, which should include much more innuendo and tongue-in-cheek asides, if not some actual cheek — and thus I recommend you gift him Burt Reynolds' new memoir But Enough About Me (no, not "Butt"). There's apparently a lot more to Burt than his 1970s nude centrefold, and Trudeau, reduced to his broad chest, strong jaw and wavy hair by the U.S. press, may need, one day, to make a similar argument after posing tastefully nude to raise awareness about climate change.

On to the next: Angela Merkel, Time magazine 2015 Person of the Year.

Perhaps you don't speak German or know much about Germany or even how to properly pronounce her name, though it's really not that hard (it's a hard "g"). You perhaps do know that she is considered a modern-day international-diplomacy and left-wing-enough Wonder Woman. Hence, the perfect gift is Jill Lepore's The Secret History of Wonder Woman. There are always lessons for politicians to be found in history, and this book charts Wonder Woman's connection to first-wave feminism and details of her creator's love of S&M. Like I said, much to learn.

Of course your shopping list won't be dealt with purely by a trip to your local, independent bookstore that's been around so long it's practically heritage designated.

So, for the ISIL fighter on your list, you'll need to head online and research the right fine French perfume, or perhaps a Twix chocolate bar. Let me explain: in a recent interview on National Public Radio, a man who'd escaped from an ISIL-controlled town detailed the fascination ISIL fighters have with Western goods, even luxury cars. So if you can afford it, splurge on a Ferrari.

And there you have it: Christmas made easy! Happy shopping and ho ho ho!

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metro LIFE

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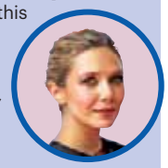
Nailed it! Kerry Washington is OPI's new creative ambassador

GOSSIP BRIEFS

Has Swift gone mad with trademarking power?

Taylor Swift decided to close out her banner year by trying to trademark a whole slew of terms, including "Blank space," "Swiftmas" and "1989." Swift filed 20 trademark applications in all. NED EHRBAR/FOR METRO

Elizabeth Olsen dumped fiancé over the phone



Oh man, this is rough. Actor Boyd Holbrook, former fiancé of Elizabeth Olsen, apparently feels like enough time has gone by to vent his frustrations about the demise of their relationship — a breakup neither had officially confirmed before now.

"On the same day that my best friend died, I got a call from my girl to tell me it was over," Holbrook tells Man of the World magazine, referring to the split as a "divorce," even. The one-two punch of Olsen's breakup call and friend David Armstrong's death led Holbrook to become "consumed with my own personal depression," he says, though he did eventually cheer himself up over the past 10 months. NED EHRBAR/FOR METRO

Fashion Santa is the new red

Paul Mason, also known as Fashion Santa, has gained international attention for his collaboration with Yorkdale Shopping Centre as the Toronto mall's Fashion Santa. Mason is taking selfies with shoppers to raise funds for The Hospital for Sick Children. CHRIS NICHOLLS/HANDOUT/THE CANADIAN PRESS

PAUL MASON

Long-time model takes selfies for SickKids

Paul Mason has devoted three decades to modelling, but the worldwide attention he's received for his stylish take on Santa Claus is a fashionable first.

Toronto's Yorkdale Shopping Centre enlisted Mason as its resident Fashion Santa and the face of the mall's holiday campaign.

During the festive season, he is also posing for selfies with shoppers in support of SickKids Foundation, which raises funds on behalf of Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children.

But beyond his own white beard and a penchant for red and white, Mason shares little else in common with the jolly old elf — and that's part of what's made him an overnight sensation.

The 6-foot-1 model has made a splash posing in sleek designer wear and striking poses in and around the mall showcasing his modern twist on St. Nick.

The images have gone viral, garnering attention from magazines like Time, Fortune and Harper's Bazaar, and press from across the pond from the Telegraph newspaper and BBC.

"It's just the most unexpected thing," said Mason, 51.

"Of course, I've had a long career — 30 years as a model prior to social media — and this is something else. I've never seen anything like it.

"Through working all over the world, I have friends in all the major cities, and collectively they've come together and just supported what's going on. But they're equally as shocked as anyone else."

Mason collaborated with Yorkdale last year, but the shopping centre embarked on a larger promotional push with this year's campaign, said marketing director Lucia Connor.

Connor said she believes part of the intense interest stems from the ability of adults to reconnect with a part of their childhood.

"When we speak to some of the customers that come through to see Santa, the adults get so excited and they say: 'The last time I took a photo with Santa I was young, I was little,'" she said.

"I think now what people are able to do is now proudly display their own photo of adult Fashion Santa, and instead of the mantel, they're displaying it on their social media feeds."

Mason is slated to take on Fashion Santa duty at the mall on Dec. 18, 19, 20 and 23.

For every selfie taken and posted on social media and accompanied by the hashtag "YorkdaleFashionSanta," Yorkdale will donate $1 to SickKids Foundation, up to $10,000. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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JOHANNA SCHNELLER **WHAT I'M WATCHING**

SOUNDING JOY Bill Murray's "natural role is sending out quips from the sidelines. Miley is a star."

Miley Cyrus with George Clooney, left, and Bil Murray in A Very Murray Christmas. CONTRIBUTED

Miley puts the merry in Murray Christmas

THE SHOW **A VERY MURRAY CHRISTMAS (NETFLIX)**

THE MOMENT **THE MILEY MIRACLE**

For 40 minutes, we've watched people be sad. Bill Murray has the Christmas blues. A snowstorm has kept his guests from showing up at Manhattan's Carlysle Hotel to tape his holiday special. He trades barbs with his agents (Amy Poehler and Julie White). He talks to a distressed bride and groom (Rashida Jones and Jason Schwartzman).

Finally, something magical happens: Murray passes out, and into his dream, on a sleigh, rides… Miley Cyrus. She wears a fur-trimmed red mini with matching pumps. She sits on a white grand piano and belts out Silent Night. She saves Christmas — and Murray's ass.

I'm not saying there isn't a place for sadness during the holidays. There is. But this is ironic sadness, and Christmas and irony do not go well together. You end up feeling nothing.

Murray, director Sophia Coppola, and writer Mitch Glazer clearly are enamoured with the random nature of holiday specials — how celebs just show up and sing. Unfortunately, they don't seem to realize that the randomness had a point: the singing (example: Bing Crosby and David Bowie's famous duet of The Little Drummer Boy). This has entirely too much croaking. It's an un-special.

Also, it may be heretic for me to say this, but I'm growing weary of Murray. He was smart to dole himself out sparingly all these years. When you see too much of him, you realize how thin his schtick is. His natural role is sending out quips from the sidelines. Miley is a star.

Johanna Schneller is a media connoisseur who zeroes in on pop-culture moments. She appears Monday through Thursday.

ANIMATED HOLIDAY SPECIAL

A Nutcracker story with a lot of puck

Only in Canada would an animated The Nutcracker special be given a hockey twist.

The Curse of Clara: a Holiday Tale is based on Vickie Fagan's autobiographical short story recalling her days dancing in The Nutcracker for the National Ballet of Canada. The year is 1972 and a young ballerina reaches into the hockey world for inspiration — specifically, a legendary Canada-U.S.S.R showdown.

One of the stars of that unforgettable series was former Boston Bruins scoring ace Phil Esposito. The centreman led the NHL professionals to a come-from-behind win against the perennial Olympic hockey champs from what was then known as the Soviet Union.

WILE E. ESPOSITO Asked what cartoon character he most relates to, Esposito laughed and said, "Wile E. Coyote — except he got beat up all the time!"

In the special, Esposito's heroics — and charisma — inspire a young ballerina to dance to her goal.

Esposito lends his voice to the special along with veteran Hockey Night in Canada play-by-play announcer Bob Cole — who called the actual Summit Series on radio that September of 1972 — former prima ballerina Karen Kain, Sheila McCarthy, Sara Botsford and Saara Chaudry.

The special premieres Dec. 14 on CBC. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Hockey meets ballet in The Curse of Clara. SMILEY GUY STUDIOS

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The first step to establishing rapport with someone is awareness. Be mindful of body language, breathing mood, and try to play off that, advises life coach Niurka. ISTOCK

The skill you need to get what you want

ADVICE

The key to negotiating with and influencing people? Rapport

Raquel Laneri
Metro | New York

One of the most popular self-help books ever written is called How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie, and, frankly, it's no wonder: Who doesn't want to will others into doing what one wants, whether through one's presence, words or sheer charisma?

Well, life coach Niurka — yes, just Niurka, like Madonna and Cher — says the key to such persuasiveness, and to one's empowerment, is communication, and there's one very important component to that: rapport.

"Rapport is essential in all negotiations, because when there's rapport the decision-maker will want to work with you, even if you're not saying the perfect thing," says Niurka, whose new book is Supreme Influence: Change Your Life with the Power of the Language You Use. But creating rapport is a subtle art: you can't exactly fake affinity, or chemistry. We asked the expert for her advice on establishing that kind of connection.

Be aware

The first step to establishing rapport is awareness: after all, you have to be self-aware enough to know when you aren't establishing a rapport with someone, or when you lose it. "Oftentimes people communicate too soon," she says. "They're so in tune with what they want to say rather than being totally present with the person and the situation." Notice your target's body language, her breathing, her mood, and try to play off that.

Care about the bigger picture

When talking to a boss or supervisor, don't make it about you, you, you. "You have to authentically care about the bigger picture, not just your agenda," advises Niurka. "Before you go in ask yourself not just 'What do I want?' or 'How can I get what I want in this conversation?' but 'What's important to this person, to this company as a whole?'"

Ask questions

One important — and easy — way to establish rapport and show that you genuinely care about the other person's needs and concerns is to ask questions. "Say: 'I'm curious about what's working, or what isn't working,' in terms of a particular context — or, 'If you can change one thing in this department what would it be?'" suggests Niurka. "You want someone to get passionate and then connect on that point of passion: you don't want to be the one who's passionate and trying to sell them on it. You want them to have a buy-in."

One more thing ...

"When you're going to an important meeting — whether it's one-on-one with your boss or giving a big presentation to a group of people — be clear on your intention, without attachment to outcome," says Niurka. "You don't want to get tunnel vision, so you've got to be clear what is the essence of what it is that you're inspired to create or achieve and then be open to all the different ways you can make that a reality."

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Know the cost of home ownership

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PLANNING

Your budget needs to cover more than just the mortgage

Gail Vaz-Oxlade
For Metro Canada

Owning a home is an expensive proposition.

People think all you have to do is figure out whether you can afford the mortgage payments and taxes. They're wrong.

Owning a home requires planning and a big commitment in terms of time and money. Lots of people who think that they're ready have seriously miscalculated. And then their dream home turns into a money pit.

Another mistake new homeowners make is not changing anything about the way they spend their money once they move into a place of their own. Sure, their housing costs have gone up, but so what? If you're used to buying whatever you want, whenever you want, and you keep up that bad habit, in no time at all, you'll be floundering.

Time to swap some bad habits for some good ones.

It's sometimes pretty hard to see what you're doing wrong, so it's good to know that your partner will be willing and able to spot your flaws and point them out to you. Ha!

And, of course, the best way to see the error of one's ways is to put a dollar value on the stuff you've been buying.

Whether it's junk food or expensive shampoo, once you add up what that indulgence is costing over the long term, you'll want to stop.

Sometimes even the most obvious misstep can't be avoided simply because people hate giving up on an idea once they've committed to it. That's where doing the math becomes the bright light that makes it clear if you'll make it or not as new homeowners.

Time to make a new budget incorporating all the costs associated with owning a home, and adjusting the amount you'll spend elsewhere to compensate for higher shelter costs.

Add up the mortgage payment, property taxes, condo fees, utilities and insurance. Don't forget to budget between about two per cent (in cities) to four per cent (in the country) of the value of your home for home maintenance every year to keep a house in reasonable shape.

If you have an older home that needs work, you should use the higher number.

Subtract the amount you're currently spending to keep a roof over your head.

The difference — the increase in your shelter costs — has to come from somewhere, so what are you not going to spend money on to have that home of your dreams? Will you give up daily coffee, lunch out, that winter vacation you so look forward to?

Something's gotta give, and here's where you decide what that something (or those somethings) will be.

When you work out how much you'll need in your budget you'll probably choke.

Once you get over your sputtering, know that since your home is likely to be your biggest financial asset, you better take good care of it. From lawn care to repainting every few years, from a new furnace to replacing the roof, home ownership is an expensive business.

If you aren't up for the responsibility, renting is always an option.

For more money advice, visit Gail's website at gailvazoxlade.com

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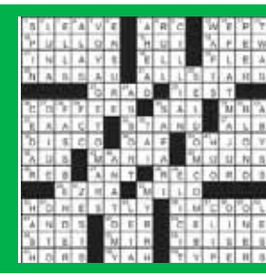

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The Cincinnati Bengals were hit hard Sunday — they were beaten 33-20 by Pittsburgh and lost quarterback Andy Dalton to a broken thumb

Raptors deep-six 76ers

NBA

Toronto wins 10th straight against league's cellar dwellers

SUNDAY At ACC

96	76
RAPTORS	76ERS

DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points and grabbed eight rebounds to lift the Toronto Raptors 96-76 over the lowly Philadelphia 76ers on Sunday.

Luis Scola added 22 points, while Kyle Lowry scored 16 for the Raptors (16-9), who ended their six-game homestand with four straight wins after opening with a pair of losses.

Jahlil Okafor led the Sixers (1-24) with 23 points, while Robert Covington had 15 and Isaiah Canaan finished with 10.

SCHEDULE
The Raptors play their next three on the road, against the Indiana Pacers, Charlotte Hornets, and Miami Heat.

The Raptors now have won 10 straight versus Philly, a streak that stretches back to the beginning of the 2013-14 season, the most wins over the Sixers of any team in the NBA.

The Raptors led by as many as 20 points, but, in what's becoming a bad habit, they couldn't put the young Sixers squad away for good until the dying minutes. They led 69-58 going into the fourth quarter, but a couple of Covington three-pointers helped pull the Sixers to within six points midway through the period.

Fouls would cost Philly down the stretch as a parade of Raptors to the free-throw line put Toronto back up by 12 with just over four minutes left. DeRozan muscled his way to the rim for a layup with 2:25 to play that put Toronto up by 14 and sent dozens of fans streaming to the Air Canada Centre doors for an early exit.

Toronto shot 41 per cent on the night, while holding Philadelphia to 33 per cent. The Sixers out-rebounded Toronto 52-41, but giveaways proved costly for the struggling visitors — they coughed up 28 points on 22 turnovers.

Scola led the way in the first quarter with 14 points as the Raptors raced out to 32-14 lead.

A three-pointer by Covington pulled the Sixers to within four points as the Raptors allowed their guests back into the game in the second quarter. The Raptors took a 52-44 lead into the halftime break.

The Raptors pulled ahead by 20 on a three by Lowry with three-and-a-half minutes to play in the third quarter, but the Sixers closed the frame with a 9-0 run to pull to within 11 with a quarter left to play.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

DeMar DeRozan of the Raptors looks to get a shot off against the 76ers' Nerlens Noel at Air Canada Centre on Sunday. FRANK GUNN/THE CANADIAN PRESS

HOCKEY

Bernier tagged with loss in final game in minors

Jonathan Bernier finally experienced defeat in the AHL.

Jonathan Bernier TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

The Utica Comets beat the goaltender and the Toronto Marlies 5-4 Sunday at the Ricoh Coliseum in Bernier's final appearance under the terms of his 10-day conditioning assignment.

Bernier is expected back at Leafs camp Monday after going 3-1-0, with three shutouts, for the minor-league team.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Canucks lend Virtanen to Canadian junior team

Jake Virtanen of the Vancouver Canucks was given permission to join Canada's national junior team on Sunday ahead of the world junior hockey championship.

Earlier in the day, Hockey Canada completed its first round of cuts to its selection camp roster. Forwards Pierre-Luc Dubois, Michael Dal Colle and Spencer Watson were cut by Hockey Canada along with defenceman Jakob Chychrun.

The cuts came after Canada beat a team of all-stars from Canadian universities, 5-0, in an exhibition game. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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NFL

Panthers hit new level of dominance to improve to 13-0

Cam Newton raced from one end of the Carolina Panthers' sideline to the other in the final moments of a 38-0 rout of the Atlanta Falcons on Sunday, raising his arms to the crowd as fans cheered on their emotional MVP candidate.

"I believe right now it's our moment as Panthers," Newton said with a smile. "We try to seize it as much as possible."

Newton — and the fans — had plenty of reason to celebrate.

The fifth-year quarterback completed 15 of 21 passes for 265 yards and three touchdowns, and the unbeaten Panthers clinched a first-round bye in the NFC playoffs in what Newton described as the team's most complete game.

It's hard to argue that.

The Panthers out-gained the Falcons 424-230, forced four turnovers and matched the franchise's largest margin of victory.

SUNDAY In Charlotte

38	0
PANTHERS	FALCONS

It was never close.

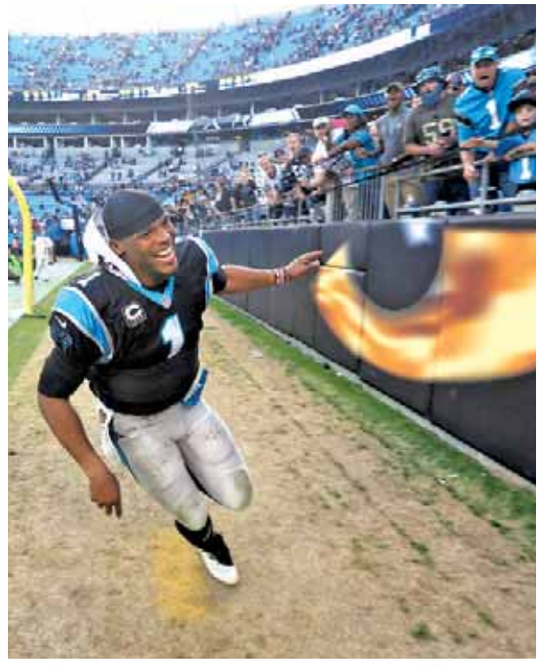
Jonathan Stewart ran for a one-yard TD and Newton connected on scoring strikes of 74 and 46 yards to Ted Ginn Jr. as the Panthers (13-0) scored on their first three possessions to take a 21-0 first quarter lead.

Newton also threw a four-yard TD pass to Ed Dickson in the final seconds of the first half before leaving for good at the end of the third quarter with Carolina up 38. He finished with a career-high QB rating of 153.3.

"Don't ease up on the gas," Newton said. "We want to be considered finishers."

Carolina's defence had two interceptions, two fumble recoveries and registered five sacks — two by defensive tackle Kawann Short — while limiting struggling Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan to 224 yards passing.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Cam Newton has already thrown a career-high 28 TD passes — with three games left to play. BOB LEVERONE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MMA

McGregor all set for superstardom

Gab is just one of Conor McGregor's many gifts.

The Irish star possesses a punching power that has made him an undisputed world champion in just seven UFC fights. McGregor also has an uncanny ability to predict not only the outcome of a fight, but the manner in which he'll accomplish his next feat of pugilistic prowess.

McGregor called his shot well before his featherweight title bout with Jose Aldo at UFC 194, vowing he wouldn't need a full round to stop a champion who hadn't lost in 10 years. And then he delivered that shot to Aldo's jaw to end the fight in just 13 seconds — a little quicker than even he expected.

"Mystic Mac strikes again," McGregor said.

For as much as McGregor talks, he was sure to get some predictions right. Yet when asked to foresee his own future after he ended Aldo's 18-fight winning streak, McGregor wasn't quite ready.

"I'll give it some time," McGregor said Saturday night.

Indeed, McGregor reigns atop the featherweight division and the sport after a remarkable 2015. He won three fights, made untold millions and raised his fame near the heights reached by Ronda Rousey, who will be featured alongside him on the cover of EA Sports' new UFC video game.

"I think I am the pound-for-pound No. 1," McGregor said. And he predicts next year will be even bigger. The Dublin native's next fight will be a title bout at either featherweight or lightweight.

Conor McGregor GETTY IMAGES

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RECIPE Spicy Beef Tacos

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

These easy tacos get a zing of heat from chili but a warmth from cumin and cinnamon.

Ready in
Prep time: 30 minutes
Serves 4

Ingredients
- 1 large sweet potato, diced into bite-size pieces
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 1/2 tsp salt, divided
- 1 lb organic lean ground beef
- 1 Tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp dried oregano
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 tsp pepper
- 1/4 red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup shaved Monterey Jack cheese
- A handful of chopped fresh cilantro
- Salsa
- 8 corn tortillas, warmed according to package directions

Directions
1. Preheat oven to 400 F.
2. In a bowl, toss sweet potato with olive oil and 1/2 tsp salt. Spread sweet potato pieces out in a single layer on a lined baking sheet. Bake in the oven for 5 to 7 minutes. Toss and then bake another 3 to 5 minutes, or until fork tender. Remove potatoes from oven and place in a bowl.
3. In a large skillet, cook beef over medium heat until browned, about 10 minutes.
4. In a small bowl, blend chili powder, cumin, cinnamon and dried oregano. Stir into the meat the garlic, spice blend, pepper and remaining salt; cook for another 2 minutes. Remove beef from heat and transfer to serving dish.
5. Place beef, sweet potato, slices of red onion, cheese, fresh cilantro, salsa and tortillas out on the table for taco assembly. Enjoy.

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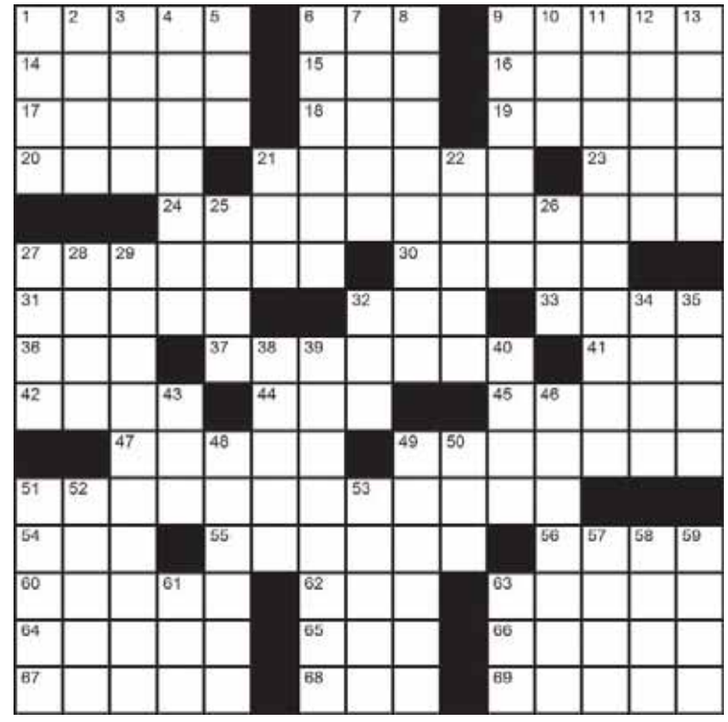
BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



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1. Possessed, in ye olden days
6. Winter roads worry
9. Country legend Johnny's
14. Join
15. Ho! Ho! Ho! X-__ (Dec. 25th)
16. Tear that paper: 2 wds.
17. Concluded
18. Kitty's rival
19. Irish rebel Rory
20. Momentarily
21. __ mustache (Sported by Sherlock Holmes creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle)
23. "Whistle __ the Lave O't": Song by Scottish poet Robert Burns
24. Holiday candies by #49-Down celebrating their 130th anniversary: 2 wds.
27. Noncompliant
30. Flair
31. Lagoon-in-the-middle island
32. "__ recall..."
33. Stroller, to a Brit
36. Neither's partner
37. Appetizer served with plum sauce: 2 wds.
41. Pasta names suffix
42. 'Within'-meaning prefix
44. Swiss peak
45. Mr. Williams of "Happy Days"
47. Animal of The Andes
49. Doorkeeper
51. What people do when they sign into their e-mail accounts: 2 wds.
54. Bit of food
55. Of bears
56. 'Demo' suffix (Politician sort)
60. Get __ (Score in hockey)
62. "How was __ know?"
63. The Congo's former name
64. "Irma la __" (1963)
65. Grandma
66. Stick on
67. Fashion show walk
68. Unit of work
69. Bug: 2 wds.

DOWN
1. Shades
2. __ Domini (AD)
3. "Thank You" singer
4. Sheet that when painted over reveals a design beneath
5. Bill's bogus buddy
6. Influential effect
7. Shower sealant
8. Starbucks serving
9. Surname of one of Neil Young's bandmates
10. Purpose
11. Cutlery user's slip of the tongue?
12. Just-got-the-job person
13. 'Trick' suffixes
21. Get the glory
22. Up to a certain time
25. Fit, fiddle-style
26. "Superman's Dead" rock gr. from Toronto
27. Stand-up comedian Mr. Cook
28. Collar type
29. Archaeology in New Brunswick... Historic trading post in Saint John: 2 wds.
32. Dadaist Jean
34. Kind of buffalo
35. Duluth's state, for short
38. Nintendo enthusiast
39. Translucent envelope material for storing stamps
40. Tardy
43. Previous
46. Instant coffee brand
48. Protector-from-harm charm
49. Family-owned New Brunswick chocolatier since 1873
50. Bronze __
51. Map's lines, often
52. Grain fungus
53. Ravi Shankar's instrument
57. Fissure
58. Opera offering
59. Communicate, techie-style
61. Prefix with 'puncture'
63. 'Zig' add-on

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS by Sally Brompton

Aries March 21 - April 20
Watch your back and think twice before giving anyone the benefit of the doubt. The Sun may be moving through your fellow Fire sign of Sagittarius but so is Saturn, planet of limitation, and that means someone may be working against you.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
You may not want to but it's time to give up on a goal that requires the kind of cash you no longer have. Let it go and next time aim for something cheaper.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
You will get conflicting advice but you know what must be done, so do it. Trust your instincts and hope for the best. The best will happen.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
You may be tempted to call the bluff of those you are negotiating with and hold out for a better offer but the planets warn that is not a good idea. You would be wise to seal the deal on the terms being offered.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
Your confidence could slump as Saturn makes it easy to see nothing but grey skies. Your problems may be all in the mind but if you believe bad things are going to happen then they most likely will.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Someone is refusing to see sense. You tried to point them in the right direction, so if they make a mess of things it's their own fault.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Some people may say that you're losing your edge, that you are not as decisive and dynamic as you used to be, but it isn't true. Even a Libra is entitled to relax once in a while.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
Try not to appear too eager today. If you can give others, especially rivals, the impression that you don't care whether you win or lose you'll lull them into a false sense of security.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
You can't change past failures, so there is no point in dwelling on them. However, while the Sun is in your sign you can have a few successes, so stop being negative and start doing things that get you noticed.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
Something is bothering you and your rivals and enemies are beginning to pick up on your fear. Don't worry about whether you are moving in the right direction because all roads lead to the same destination.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
If you try to live up to other people's image of you then you are likely to exhaust yourself for no good reason. Your health should be your main concern.

Pisces Feb. 20 - March 20
If someone in a position of authority asks you to do something of a questionable nature today you must turn them down flat. Principle comes before power.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

	9		1		6		5	
3			4		7			2
9	3						2	1
				6				
4	5						8	6
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	4		3		5		9	

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